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ABSTRACT

The document examines the need to develop and implement more adequate evaluation methods for broad-aimed adult education programs, and presents some suggestions. Broad-aimed adult education programs are described as those which seek to affect the quality of the learners' lives through education and to help learners cope more effectively with their problems. This type of program is generally funded under the Smith Lever Act, 1914, the Manpower Development and Training Act, 1962, Title I of the Higher Education Act, 1965, and the Adult Education Act, 1966. The paper's four sections include: (1) broad-aimed adult education defined and differentiated from other types of adult education, with three program types examined; (2) need for more adequate evaluation of broad-aimed adult education programs, examining current evaluation techniques; (3) false assumptions to be avoided when evaluating broad-aimed programs, giving examples of inappropriate evaluation methods; and, (4) toward more adequate evaluation of broad-aimed adult education programs, describing one approach and presenting various opinions. (LH)

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EVALUATING BROAD-AIMED PROGRAMS OF ADULT EDUCATION

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Introduction

Currently, not only in this country but also in almost every other part of the world, increased attention is being paid to adult education. After many years of being in a marginal position, adult education has come into the limelight. Being in the limelight has its advantages but also its costs. Initially, what comes into the limelight tends to receive attention, at least in part, because of its novelty. Sooner or later, however, what remains in the limelight more than momentarily usually gets closer scrutiny. It needs to be understood and its worth needs to be established.

Adult education, in its many forms ranging from functional literacy and adult basic education to continuing professional education, has been in the limelight long enough for the novelty, for the most part, to have worn off. We are well into the period when it needs to be understood and its worth established.

Focus of This Paper

Many of the adult education programs that have received the greatest amount of national and international attention and funding are relatively "broad-aimed" (Weiss and Rhein, 1969). In contrast to adult education programs with relatively narrow aims--such as those seeking primarily to teach something with little concern for how what is learned is later used--broad-aimed programs seek to affect the quality of the learners' lives through education and to help the learners cope more effectively with their problems (Farmer, 1975b, p. 23). Included in those adult education programs

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that are relatively broad-aimed are those that have been funded under the Smith Lever Act of 1914, the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965, and the Adult Education Act of 1966. Elsewhere in the world, many Functional Literacy programs are explicitly broad-aimed, since they seek not only to teach literacy but also to affect the quality of the learners' lives and to help them cope more effectively with their problems and those of the communities in which they live.

The number and size of broad-aimed adult education programs have increased rapidly during the past few years. Unfortunately, developing and implementing manageable, feasible, and "situation specific" ways to evaluate such programs have been largely neglected. It would seem that valid summative evaluation is needed to provide information essential to determining the worth of these programs. Valid formative evaluation is needed to produce information that can be feedback during further development of broad-aimed adult education programs to improve them.

In the current paper, attention is focused on broad-aimed adult education and particularly on ways to evaluate it. To do so:

1. Broad-aimed adult education is further defined and differentiated from other types of adult education.
2. Evidence of the need for more adequate evaluation of broad-aimed adult education programs is described.
3. Several false assumptions to be avoided in evaluation of broad-aimed adult education programs are presented.
4. A way to conceptualize and implement more adequate evaluation of broad-aimed adult education programs is suggested.

1. Broad-Aimed Adult Education Defined and Differentiated from Other Types of Adult Education

As indicated above, broad-aimed adult education seeks not only to teach something but also to affect the quality of the learners' lives through

education and help them cope more effectively with their problems. It has been found helpful not only in conceptualizing and implementing education for adults but also for evaluating it, to distinguish between the following types of adult education:

1. Type I--Content Centered Adult Education. This type of adult education is provided primarily to teach knowledge, attitudes, or skills. This educational process starts with what is to be taught and who is to teach it. Then, learners are sought who are willing to learn that type of information.

2. Type II--Learner Centered Adult Education. In this type of adult education, attention is paid primarily to assisting adults in learning what it is they wish to learn, usually with the teacher acting as a facilitator who helps as a co-investigator or as one who make possible self-directed learning. The learner typically seeks to learn particular knowledge, attitudes, or skills which will help in solving problems important to himself and, hopefully, in solving similar problems on his own.

3. Type III--Problem Centered Adult Education. This type of adult education primarily focuses on problems that require some form of learning in order for the problems addressed to be solved. This approach starts with a real and pressing problem and asks: "What is it in the solving of this problem to which the education of adults can contribute through the learning of knowledge, attitudes, or skills?" Then the question is asked: "Which adults need to be and can be involved in educational experiences which can lead or contribute to the solution of the problem addressed?" (Farmer, 1974, p. 43).

Broad-aimed adult education is a type of problem-centered adult education (Type III), which focuses mainly on community or societal problems. In broad-aimed adult education:

1. There is evidence of its explicitly addressing community or societal problems by linking educational resources to those problems;

2. The problem that is addressed is significant in terms of its size, complexity, and the extent of the need (i.e., suffering, etc.);

3. Its approach is educational rather than manipulative or direct action-oriented;

4. There is a strong likelihood that what is learned in the education provided will result in more effective community or societal problem solving efforts on the part of the learners and that those improved efforts, in turn, will make a positive contribution to the amelioration of community or societal problems. (Farmer and Knox, 1976, p. 28)

In other words, broad-aimed adult education is a form of education that has been deliberatly linked to community or societal problem solving.

Some forms of education are generally viewed as being primarily of intrinsic value ("having value in themselves, for their own sake, and not as a means only"[Runes, 1942, p. 148]). Other forms of education are provided basically because they are thought to be of instrumental value ("having value due to the useful consequences which they produce, a value as a means, a value as a contribution" [Runes, 1942, p. 330]). Broad-aimed adult and continuing education programs are designed to be mainly of instrumental value. After a particular broad-aimed education program has been implemented, its instrumental value can be assumed to have been established to the extent that problem solving efforts have been improved as a result of what was learned in the education provided, and in turn, that community or societal problems were ameliorated as a result of those efforts. In those instances when a broad-aimed educational program has been developed and implemented but no evaluative evidence concerning resulting changes in problem solving efforts of the learners and the effects

on the amelioration of the problems has been obtained, the program can be considered to be "truncated". (Farmer and Knox, 1976, pp. 28-29)

2. Need for More Adequate Evaluation of Broad-Aimed Adult Education Programs

Both in the United States (Caro, 1970) and elsewhere (Coombs, 1973), the major focus of broad-aimed adult and continuing education programs has been on action, with little or no attention being paid to evaluation. Based on a survey of administrators of continuing education programs in the mid-western United States, the following reasons for lack of attention having been given to the evaluation of their programs:

1. Insufficient pressure for program accountability.
2. Inadequate understanding of program evaluation and of ways to conduct validly and feasibly.
3. Reluctance to use money, time and/or other resources on program evaluation.
4. Unwillingness to require or even ask that clients take the necessary time to provide evaluative feedback.
5. Reluctance to learn evaluative results.
6. Feeling that determining the worth of a program can be done adequately merely on a subjective and impressionistic basis. (Green, 1974; Pennington, 1974).

According to Peters (1975, p. 317) and Williams (1974, p. 137), evaluations of broad-aimed educational programs for adults that have been conducted have tended to rely heavily on the following types of indicators of success:

1. Number of "graduates";
2. Number of students placed in jobs;
3. Number of participants;
4. (Occasionally), the gain in achievement scores made by adult learners;
5. Degree of participation;
6. Level of involvement;

7. Gradual or rapid expanion of a project to reach more of an intended population;

8. Number of instructors trained since the beginning of a project;

9. The rate of learners' dropping-out of classes;

10. The degree to which the objectives set out by a program have been achieved.

To be sure, from some role perspective(s) (i.e., as viewed by the funders, program administrators, or teachers) positive findings regarding these indicators, individually or in combination, can be taken to suggest that progress has been made in implementing a broad-aimed educational program and that that implementation has seemingly had some effect on the learners. A broad-aimed education program for adults can achieve all of the above, however, and still not have a positive impact on the lives of the learners and on the society about them. The worth of a broad-aimed educational program for adults hinges on the nature and extent of its success in reducing community or societal problems, or in other words, of improving quality of life. (Farmer, 1975a, p. 172)

In describing the need for more adequate evaluation of federally funded, broad-aimed adult education program, one agency stated:

> The funding of the (broad-aimed educational program for adults) has been carried out over the past five years without adequate assessment of the magnitude or persistence of the effects of the program upon the State in general or, more specifically, upon the institutions receiving the funding or the communities to be served. Neither the quarterly progress reports nor the self-evaluative final reports from the funded institutions, nor the onsite visits from the agency's administrators is sufficient in itself or in combination to provide an objective measure of the benefits of this federal program.
>
> The lack of (adequate) evaluation of the program, a lack which exists not only in this State, but nationally, has prolonged the unfortunate situation in which the personnel have been forced to continue making decisions without the benefit of sufficient feedback. (The Request for Proposal for the Evaluation of Title I (HEA, 1965) Programs in California, 1965-1972, The California Coordinating Council for Higher Education, Sacramento, 1972).

3. False Assumptions to be Avoided

When the decision is made, either under external mandate or voluntarily, to evaluate a broad-aimed educational program for adults, care needs to be taken to identify and avoid what, for this type of evaluation, can be considered false assumptions:

1. that more is necessarily better;

2. that the use of evaluative tools such as testing, participation, and interviewing, in and of itself, constitutes valid program evaluation;

3. that evidence that a broad-aimed program has achieved relatively narrow objectives necessarily establishes its worth as a broad-aimed program;

4. that no types of causal relationships can be established between what participants learn in broad-aimed educational programs, how they apply that knowledge in social problem-solving, and the consequences of that application;

5. that the reduction of a gap between what the funders or administrators intend and what happens in the program is necessarily positive;

6. that a valid evaluation of a broad-aimed education program for adults can be accomplished by focusing merely on components of the program, without regard to the program as a whole or the ways that it interrelates with its environment. (Farmer, 1975b, pp. 25-26)

Building program evaluation on such false assumptions is likely to distort significantly the evaluative findings. Using distorted feedback may well harm the programs that are evaluated.

Evaluating a broad-aimed, problem-centered adult education program (Type III) as if it were a content-centered (Type I) or a learner centered (Type II) adult education program would be like evaluating a water bed as if it were a standard bed (equipped with a frame on legs, a set of springs, and a mattress) or a traditional Japanese bed (consisting of a mattress placed on floormats.)

Evaluating a broad-aimed adult education program as if it were a narrow-aimed one, moreover, would be similarly inappropriate. Doing so can lead to erroneous conclusions, similar to those that would be reached by evaluating the following story as a narrow-aimed event.

> A sportsman in Illinois decided to go moose hunting in Minnesota on his vacation. He made reservations by telephone for a guide to take him moose hunting.
>
> When the time came to leave for Minnesota, the sportsman put his guns in the back of his jeep. Just before he left, however, he went back into the house, and got his fishing equipment, and put it also in the jeep.
>
> Upon arrival in Minnesota, he learned that there were no moose in the vicinity. Talking to persons in the sports store, however, he learned that muskie, an exciting game fish, were hitting. He cancelled his reservation for the moose guide, hired a muskie guide, and day after day caught a limit of near-record sized muskie.
>
> After his vacation, he wrote up the story and sold it to a sports magazine.

Question #1: How would you evaluate the vacation as a moose hunt (the specified narrow aim or objective of the vacation)?

If the vacation were to be evaluated mainly as a moose hunt, one would most likely conclude that it was a failure, since no moose were shot.

Question #2: How would you evaluate the vacation as a broad-aimed event?

Evaluated as a broad-aimed event, the vacation clearly was a success, since:

1. The sportsman showed a good foresight in bringing along several types of sports equipment, broadenening the chances of his having a successful vacation.
2. He evidenced flexibility in shifting from moose hunting to muskie fishing when the circumstances warranted.
3. The fishing was excellent.
4. He obtained an unintended and unanticipated side-benefit from the money received from selling the story.
5. No undesirable events or side-effects reportedly occurred.

All in all, it seems to have been an excellent vacation, a conclusion completely opposite from the one arrived at by evaluating the vacation invalidly as a narrow-aimed event.

Unfortunately, all too frequently broad-aimed adult education programs have been evaluated (equally invalidly) as if they were narrow-aimed programs.

4. Toward More Adequate Evaluation of Broad-Aimed Adult Education Programs

During the past few years, efforts (Farmer, Sheats, and Deshler, 1972; Farmer, 1974; Farmer and Papagiannis, 1975) have been made to conceptualize and implement more adequate ways of evaluating broad-aimed adult education programs. In essence, the approach that has been developed:

1. reflects a broader-aimed evaluation approach than is implied in most other evaluative efforts dealing with broad-aimed educational programs for adults.

2. is concerned with the evaluative needs not only of those who are providing the program but also of the learners, instructors, funders, and other client groups who are interested in the program being evaluated.

3. deals with broad-aimed educational programs for adults as a chain of events, starting with the initial exposure to an idea to the actual implementation of that idea and the consequences of that implementation. Because broad-aimed educational programs for adults is generally viewed as being a purposive type of education, designed to serve useful ends or functions though not necessarily as a result of deliberate design, it seems appropriate to focus attention not only on intended consequences but also on unintended but anticipated consequences and unintended, unanticipated consequences.

4. emphasizes the importance of looking at environmental constraints that affect the implementation of broad-aimed educational programs for adults, problem-solving efforts of learners as a result of such programs, and the impact of those efforts.

Attempts to consider all aspects of a broad-aimed adult education program can lead to the identification of virtually an endless number of

evaluative questions. After having become overwhelmed by evaluative questions, one group of evaluators observed:

> The question-generating approach got wholly out of hand. Questions multiplied like the proverbial rabbits while the members of the task force looked on with Malthusian foreboding. Also, the question-generating process, in which we found ourselves ensnarled, seemed more circular than linear in direction. First, we engaged in fission and smashed big questions into numerous subquestions. Next, reacting in dismay to what we had wrought, we fused subquestions into major questions which closely resembled their forebears of two generations ago. It is not to be denied that futile tasks can be instructive, but it is our duty to urge others to seek a different conveyancy rather than mounting our treadmill.

In a recently published monograph on Program Evaluation (Farmer and Papagiannis, 1975), the author of this paper has concluded:

> Whatever conveyance is used, it needs to lead to program evaluations that are manageable, feasible, and situation specific; that portray the wholeness of programs and the relationship between them and their environments; and that provide a defensible basis for deciding exactly what is needed.
>
> No prefabricated approach, no evaluative model or design, or any set of general evaluative questions can provide the type of evaluations that have all the above characteristics. Rather, a "decision-making" approach is called for. In this approach, persons associated with the program, along with one or more external evaluators and possibly a representative of those who help fund the program, collaborate in planning and conduct a specific evaluation effort that takes into account each of the foregoing conditions.
>
> Looking at only a few isolated components of a program is an invalid approach to evaluation. Yet under most circumstances, evaluating a whole program in great depth is not feasible. One effective tool in the decision-making process might be what Amitai Etzioni calls "mixed scanning," which entails scanning a program and its environment much as an infantry scouts scans a battlefield under fire. The scout rapidly views his strategic position, identifies potential danger or opportunity spots, and givesthem close scrutiny. He does not have time to gather all the facts, nor can he look at only what is in front of him. His task is to scan, assign priorities, and select those areas that need careful scrutiny. Failure to do this may well result in a missed opportunity or a costly mistake.

The following components will typically need to be scanned:

1. need for the program
2. philosophical considerations
3. values
4. assumptions underlying or otherwise related to the program
5. the degree of the program's development, in general and in local situations
6. the context or environment in which the program functions
7. alternative ways that the program has been and is being implemented
8. consequences of the program
9. explanations of consequences--the extent to which those consequences have been attributed to the program

The effectiveness of a program is judged not only by each of these components, but also, and perhaps more importantly, by the relationship between them.

If little or nothing is known about the results of the program, major attention might well focus on results. If, however, there is ample evidence of the nature and extent of the results and reason to think that some of its components are functioning unsatisfactorily, then major attention might better focus on the educational process, on the program inputs from learners, teachers, and administrators, and on the program's context.

In this decision-making process, care needs to be taken not to identify as critical so many aspects that the evaluative effort becomes swamped with too many details. At the same time, the evaluator will want to examine the aspects selected from the point of view of the program as a whole--how they fit into and affect the program, and how much they contribute to the overall worth of the program. (Farmer, 1975b, pp. 29-31)

In gathering evaluative data concerning broad-aimed adult education programs, the use of what Dexter (1970) has described as "elite and specialized interviewing" has been found to be useful. Qualitative analysis of resulting evaluative data can be accomplished through "content analysis" (Merton, 1968). "Discriminant analysis" (Tatsuoka, 1970) has been found particularly useful in quantitative analysis of resulting evaluative data.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, it was noted that adult education was enjoying the limelight. It was suggested that sooner or later, to remain in the limelight, adult educators will need to establish the worth of their programs through valid evaluation, particularly if those programs are publicly financed and broad-aimed. The need to develop and implement more adequate ways to evaluate broad-aimed adult education programs was described, along with suggestions for doing so through the use of "mixed scanning."

Developing and implementing innovative adult education programs can be challenging and rewarding. Perhaps more challenging is developing and implementing appropriate ways of evaluating those programs so that we can learn from our experiences and demonstrate the worth of our programs to a public that seems currently to be favorably inclined to adult education.

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